LWCF Success in West Virginia

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has provided funding to help protect some of West Virginia’s most special places and ensure recreational access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. West Virginia has received approximately $246.2 million in LWCF funding over the past five decades, protecting places such as the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, Monongahela National Forest and New River Gorge National River.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP) grants are also funded under LWCF, to help protect working forests. The FLP cost-share funding supports timber sector jobs and sustainable forest operations while enhancing wildlife habitat, water quality and recreation. For example, the FLP contributed to places such as the Potomac River Hills in Morgan County. The FLP assists states and private forest owners to maintain working forest lands through matching grants for permanent conservation easement and fee acquisitions, and has leveraged approximately $4 million in federal funds to invest in West Virginia’s forests, while protecting air and water quality, wildlife habitat, access for recreation and other public benefits provided by forests.

LWCF state assistance grants have further supported hundreds of projects across West Virginia’s state and local parks including Valley Park, Cacapon State Park and Canaan Valley State Park.

Economic Benefits

Active outdoor recreation is an important part of the West Virginia economy. The Outdoor Industry Association has found that active outdoor recreation generates $9 billion in consumer spending in West Virginia, 91,000 jobs which generate $2.4 billion in wages and salaries, and produces $660 million annually in state and local tax revenue. Further, the U.S. Census reports that each year over 994,000 people hunt, fish, or enjoy wildlife-watching in West Virginia, contributing $905 million in wildlife recreation spending to the state economy.
LWCF is a simple idea: that a portion of offshore drilling fees should be used to protect important land and water for all Americans. These are not taxpayer dollars. Unfortunately, the promise of LWCF has been broken. The program is authorized to receive up to $900 million each year—but most of these funds have been diverted elsewhere. Now is the time to fix this and ensure that funds retained in the LWCF account are used for their intended conservation and recreation purposes.

LWCF supports the acquisition of land and conservation easements to protect our national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, trails, and BLM sites, grants funds to the states for local and state park needs, protects critical wildlife habitat, watersheds and recreational access, and conserves working farms, ranches and forestlands that enhance local economies.

LWCF in West Virginia

Gauley River National Recreation Area and New River Gorge Recreation Area

All public access points along West Virginia's Lower and Middle Gauley River, which is used by over 50,000 people annually, were made possible by LWCF funding. LWCF has also protected 57,000 acres in the Gauley River and New River Gorge Recreation Area that includes not just river access but over 2,000 named rock climbing routes. LWCF has also funded protection of the remnants of 19th and 20th century mining towns in the New River Gorge. These historic sites protect unique West Virginia heritage and diversify the base of visitors to the area. Roughly 1.2 million visitors enjoy these two parks annually, bringing $53 million to the local economy and directly supporting more than 700 jobs.

Fiscal Year 2020 Agency Priority Project List for West Virginia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Delegation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Hooke Brothers; Monongahela</td>
<td>$750,000</td>
<td>Manchin, Capito/Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>FS</td>
<td>George Washington and Jefferson National Forest; George Washington and Jefferson</td>
<td>$920,000</td>
<td>Manchin, Capito/Mooney</td>
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</tbody>
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Status of the Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 2019, permanent authorization of LWCF was secured as part of S. 47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Passage of the Dingell Act ensures that LWCF no longer faces the uncertainty of potential expiration, and that the unique structure and inflow of funds to LWCF is protected. The focus is now on permanent full funding for LWCF – ensuring that each year the $900 million deposited into the LWCF account actually goes towards conservation and recreation priorities. Over the 55 years of the program, over $22 billion has been diverted from LWCF to other, unknown purposes. That means that our public lands, waters, and historic sites have been put in peril. As open space continues to shrink, LWCF investments become even more critical to providing the outdoor opportunities for all future generations.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act – S. 1081 and H.R. 3195 – have passed through their respective committees and are ready for floor votes in both chambers.

LWCF Appropriations FY2000-FY2020

Note - All approximate totals derived from appropriations bills
- Forest Legacy Program & Sec. 6 funded from LWCF starting in 2004